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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION; IRAN; MEETING BETWEEN BUSH AND LULA;
04/03/07

11. SUMMARY STATEMENT

Weekend international stories include the impact of the capture of 15 British soldiers on the status of the war against Iran; and the implications of the meeting between US President George W. Bush and Brazilian President Lula da Silva for Brazil's strategic interests.

12. OPINION PIECES AND EDITORIALS

- "A swap plan"

Jorge Elias, daily-of-record "La Nacion's" international columnist, opines (04/01) "... Bush and Blair are wondering how to win the war without declaring war... And they are wondering how to react to the EU's unsympathetic reaction to the tragedy of 14 men and one woman captured in the delicate red line between a boiling war (Iraq) and a probable war (Iran).

"Iran is harassing the international community - the foreign crisis has strengthened its domestic front and since it focused attention on urgent issues, it allowed mitigating suspicion on alleged support for Iraqi insurgents, which are close to Al Qaeda, and armed political parties, which are considered terrorists, in the hottest areas of the Middle East.

"The prevailing tension is in (Iran's) favor, as well as timing and increasing oil prices. According to Plan A, if (Iran) is not bombed, it will eventually have the bomb, and once it has it, other countries will want to have their own bombs. As per Plan B, if Iran is bombed], Iran will not have the bomb, but other countries will use the possibility of having the bomb for blackmailing purposes. In one case or the other, the world will look increasingly unsafe. So much so that one and the others will only have one choice left - Plan C (tradeoff/swap plan)."

- "Iran - Another Harvest for Western 'Hawks'"

Leading "Clarín" carries an op-ed piece by Marcelo Cantelmi, its international editor, who writes (04/03) "... The entire military campaign against Iraq underlying that blurry 'anti-terrorist' war concept has had a business backdrop and it has been an attempt to extend the imperial arm and create a land aircraft carrier in the Middle East so that the US becomes a current player in the conflict... It is not hard to notice the depth of the losses suffered and what this defeat expresses...

"... The capture of the 15 British soldiers could well end up with an Iranian victory. This should not be surprising. 'The Economist' magazine has warned that finally Iran 'has been the big winner of Bush's war,' something which, it is worth recalling, 'Clarín' has sustained in solitude for the last four years."

- "An Encounter that Prioritizes Strategic Interests"

Hugo Alconada Mon, Washington-based correspondent for daily-of-record "La Nacion," (04/01) writes "George W. Bush is radioactive. Both Democrats and Republicans alike run away from him when they think of running in the 2008 presidential elections. He has a very bad image in the US and outside of it for many reasons... Lula does not like him either. However, he decided to prioritize Brazil's permanent and strategic interests over his personal taste.

"... It is good to remember that Bush is more than only Bush. Today and until January 2009, he epitomizes the presidency of the only military and economic superpower in the world. Lula understands this clearly and he is willing to work with him.

"Academic Luis Bitencourt, from the Wilson Center Brazilian Institute, said 'prospects for a deal on ethanol are the key issue in all this...'

"In spite of his obvious political weakness, Bush can still make the lives of his interlocutors easy or difficult. He could negotiate a deal on bio-fuels. He can open or close US markets a little bit further by granting or limiting preferential tariffs... He could influence the IMF and, in the Argentine case, he could facilitate (or not) negotiations with the Paris Club.

"... Brazil wants much more than an alliance for bio-fuels. It wants to become the only 'leader of the region,' such as India, China, South Africa or Australia in other geopolitical areas ... and, a permanent seat at the UN Security Council. It will take years, and perhaps it will never attain it, but it is a long-term Brazilian strategic goal.

"... Bush feels the need for showing results. In Latin America, this will have an impact for tangible benefits for anyone who knows how to sniff out that weakness and woo the White House. Peruvian Alan Garcia and Uruguayan Tabare Vazquez are walking this road. And Lula is leading the march."

- "The US Wants Brazil to 'Put a Brake on the Disobedient'"

Eleonora Gosman, Sao Paulo-based correspondent for leading "Clarín," penned (04/01) "... (US President) George W. Bush again confirmed for Lula that Brazil is a key piece in the US foreign strategy due to the 'enormous influence of this nation' ... However, Bush did not want to publicly and explicitly support Brazil's entry into the UN Security Council.

"... Nevertheless, the lack of major announcements do not cloud the US decision to make Brazil a 'privileged interlocutor' in Latin America. Mexico distanced itself from the region and Colombia does not have enough weight for the mission. That is why Bush 'trusts' that Lula will play a moderating role vis-à-vis regional processes like those led by Hugo Chavez, Evo Morales and Rafael Correa and to a lesser extent by Nestor Kirchner. In this framework the US is working to consolidate a 'very strong alliance' with Brazil that will serve as a counterweight to the axis of the 'disobedient.'"

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